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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly describes a model for broadening community educators' participation in economic development by improving the quality of developmental knowledge and leadership. Specific goals of the model include helping economic development leaders to understand existing community attitudes and structure, and helping leaders form development strategies while simultaneously providing the necessary training for development projects. The program is implemented in 4 phases during the course of 2 to 3 years, beginning with a survey that identifies community leaders. Phase 2 involves community evaluation and analysis by a resource panel. Phase 3 involves creation of a 5-year development plan during a series of knowledge enhancement programs. Phase 4 involves local citizens working together to implement the plan. There are also components for personal skills training, economic development seminars, and a final evaluation by program leaders and participants. This paper offers examples of four rural Georgia counties where economic development efforts were assisted by such extension education services. (TES)

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A MODEL FOR DEPLOYING RURAL LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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A MODEL FOR DEPLOYING RURAL LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Leadership makes things happen in local communities. To be an effective leader, a person must be informed, committed, and involved. To foster economic development within a community, one must continually strive to maintain and strengthen the leadership base. By striving to involve new people in the leadership structure of a community, one may introduce new ideas and perspectives and stimulate enthusiasm; as well as, represent a much broader segment of the total community. This continually evolving leadership pool must be nurtured through a repeated process of leadership development.

The Economic Development leader participation model seeks to broaden involvement of community educators in defining strategic economic plans for their localities, to make these people more aware of the issues and concepts applicable to this activity, and to expose them to innovative techniques to enhance economic growth prospects in their locality. Community educators are defined as those individuals who are likely to share information or their knowledge base or their access to resources in the process of contributing to or guiding economic development activities within the locality. The primary objectives of the economic development model are:

1. To create a proper atmosphere for enhanced participation in economic development activities within the county.

2. To assist economic development leadership to understand existing community structure, attitudes, and perceptions.

3. To help local leadership provide directions for development efforts and to maintain a focus on desired goal attainment.

4. To assist local leadership in the formulation of economic development strategy and the requisite skills needed to implement this strategy.

5. To provide motivation for expanding involvement of local leaders and/or educators in the process and implementation of economic development activities.

The Economic Development Participation model incorporates a program agenda which seeks to maximize potential for accomplishing the above objectives. The implementation of this program involves four phases implemented over a time frame of 2-3 years. The first phase involves the application of a leadership and perception survey. Before community leaders and educators can seek to implement desired change, they must have some feel for existing attitudes and perceptions with respect to those factors which impact economic development objectives and outcomes.

The leadership survey seeks to identify those individuals who are perceived as having influence or significant impact on community activities. These are the main line people the program seeks to involve in an intensive awareness and knowledge enhancement effort in Phase II and III. While these individuals are recruited for active participation in the core curriculum, other interested community residents are encouraged to participate through self registration in one or more varied activities.

Phase II of the model program involves community evaluation and analysis. People can make better decisions when they are aware of all the parameters impacting their decisions. People need insight as to the existing framework of their community to be able to direct their development efforts most effectively and efficiently. Therefore, participants are presented an in-depth review of their county's demographic, social, and economic makeup; trends observed for each of these factors, and possible implications for future community growth perspectives.

A resource panel is assembled to come into a community and critique its community assets for various types of developmental opportunities so that local leadership can observe outside perceptions and views of their community.

Leadership is encouraged to utilize various survey techniques, institutional services, and critique panels to broaden their perspective of how their community compares with other communities.

Another aspect of Phase II includes the development of a computerized data management system. This system is designed to facilitate the flow of both primary and secondary data to local communities in forms most usable for economic development efforts. Data sources are identified and formats are developed for using data management software via microcomputer to customize the presentation of relevant information.

Phase III of the program involves a broad spectrum of the community in a series of knowledge enhancement programs related to strategic community planning as it impacts economic development. These leaders are assisted in applying this knowledge to perfect their skills in strategic planning. The final outcome of this phase is preparation and implementation of a five-year plan for economic development. A series of ten learning modules are identified which prepare participants to generate their own strategic plan.

Phase IV involves local citizens working together to implement the strategic plan which was developed in Phase III. Most economic development activity will fall within five identified sectors. They include retail, manufacturing, tourism, agribusiness, and commercial/distribution. Each community group selects those sectors to implement development activities and which activities to pursue. These types of activities may include the development of visual presentations about their community, direct mail

campaigns, store critiques, and other community specific undertakings.

Also, participants engage in personal skill enhancement activities which facilitate successful accomplishment of a strategic plan. These include such things as leadership and sales presentation training.

The final phase of the program involves evaluation, assessment, and plan modification. At this point, local participants are encouraged to critique the effectiveness of the overall program as to achieving economic development in their locality and the contribution each component made in enhancing the ability of local leadership to accomplish economic development goals.

Formal evaluation consists of reviewing various economic development parameters at the beginning of the program and at yearly intervals for a period of five years to see if observable changes occur in these communities.

Regional economic development seminars are an integral part of the overall development effort. This approach facilitates a regional perspective among local leaders in county economic development efforts. Extension seeks participation among state agencies, private consultants, elected officials, and local chambers of commerce in delivery of these programs.

Participation in the program is at the discretion and election of local leadership. The model is explained to commissioners, city officials, chamber leadership, and other reputable leaders in the community. They consider the program and make the election to participate over the three year cycle.

To date, the economic development program thrust has been very successful in creating a more knowledgeable base of community leaders in economic development.

In Crisp County, Georgia, the group was instrumental in getting the city and county commissioners to implement freeport; promoted the successful passage of a hospital bond issue; supported the employment of a full-time economic developer outside of the chamber; and is promoting the development of issue groups to address specific community concerns such as teenage pregnancy.

In Turner County the group initiated efforts to improve Interstate 75 exit and was successful in obtaining commitments from DOT to spend two hundred fifty thousand dollars. A streetscape and facade design plan is now being pursued.

In Dooly County the leadership from multiple in-county municipalities has been brought together to pursue an overall economic development strategy. The group facilitated the development of a concept design for the city of Pinehurst as a

historical cotton village. They sought the creation of an area economic development position for the multi-county area.

In Troup County, Georgia, the program was initiated in 1985. The 1988 county report includes the following highlights:

* The Transportation Authority was started following the groundwork laid by the Transportation Committee.

* The Governmental Bodies Committee requested that the Department of Community Affairs do a study to determine whether a consolidated jail facility was needed.

* A brochure was published detailing historical and cultural highlights of Troup County.

* A 14-week leadership development seminar was jointly sponsored by Troup 2000 and the Chamber of Commerce. Thirty-two volunteer leaders from throughout the county graduated this fall.

* Recommended the passage of the 1% sales option tax.

* The Cities In Schools program is being developed for the drop-out students.

* A brochure was produced inviting people to be on a speakers bureau to enable our students to have a better understanding of the world of work.

* The Education Committee sponsored a speaker at a Chamber of Commerce breakfast to describe the Dalton Program which has dramatically reduced drop-outs. Over 200 people attended.

* An indepth long range planning session was conducted.

* A new committee was formed to investigate the needs of those such as the elderly and the poor who do not have adequate transportation.

In these efforts, the Extension Service is serving as a facilitator to bring in educational resources and to assist these leaders in the refinement of their strategic planning capabilities. They are encouraged to make greater utilization of staff in agencies such as Industry and Trade and public utilities companies.